

Halsey

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Category: Halo
Genre: Angst
Language: English
Characters: C. Halsey
Status: Completed
Published: 2013-01-03 18:44:06
Updated: 2013-01-03 18:44:06
Packaged: 2016-04-27 03:56:53
Rating: K
Chapters: 1
Words: 1,261
Publisher: www.fanfiction.net
Summary: Spartans never die, if only that were true

Halsey

She sat in the horribly uncomfortable office chair the brass had given her, military standard issue they said. She wasn't some UNSC pencil pusher however, and didn't need to be rudely reminded by her chair that her job was far too important to slack off, recline, and take an afternoon siesta. She would put in an order for a better one tomorrow, along with all the quality scientific equipment that was somehow deemed too expensive by the Office of Naval Intelligence.

It was an abysmal excuse for a public high school lab, let alone a scientist of her stature; if she was going to be staying in back water facility as long as she was told she would, some serious improvements had to be made. "Cortana" she summoned, and the feminine purple avatar appeared before her.

"Yes Doctor?" it replied in a voice much younger than her own. The young AI was developing nicely; hardly a fully functioning 'smart' AI like the ones she had overseen development of so many years ago, Cortana was a simple receptionist or organiser. After all, with mind as great as her own, she had no time to deal with trivial things such as knowing where each and every tiny useless scrap of paper was, she needed to focus on far more important things.

"Clear my schedule of all events between 6 and 9 tomorrow, secure a transport, and plot a course to the nearest sizeable town, I need to pick up a few things."

"I'm sorry Doctor, but you have been placed under house arrest and are unable to leave the premises." The crude copy replied with emotionless practicality.

The whisper of a smile curled up the corner of her lip, "What

Parangosky doesn't know won't her."

"I'm sorry Doctor, but you have been place under--"

She groaned in annoyance, pressing bony fingers against weak temples, "Yes, Thank you Cortana!" her sarcasm brewing, sending the AI away.

She leaned forward with her head in her hands as an exasperated sigh broke through faded pink lips. The real Cortana was never this stupid, the real Cortana would have found her benign disobedience amusing; of course she would have protested at first, seeing of course that it was a wrong thing to do, but what did it really matter in the grand scheme of things? She would've come around eventually.

"Cortana, do something useful for a change and play my music." She sighed sloping back into the increasingly uncomfortable chair, dropping her excessively heavy boots down onto the desk. That ought to rustle some feathers.

"Which track would you like me play Doctor?"

She all but glared directly at the AI console

"Playing track three" Cortana replied.

Her harsh features and harsher thoughts began to soften as the dulcet tones of Debussy drifted through the airwaves from suspended speakers in the corners of her "lab". Perhaps she wasn't giving Cortana 2.0 enough credit, she seemed to understand when the doctor became lessâ€¦ tolerant. No way she could stand up to the original though, that's what happens when you make a flash cloned AI from a flash cloned brain, you're bound to lose something on the way. She wondered where Cortana would be now, destroyed in the destruction of Instillation 00? Somehow, she doubted that very much. She had SPARTAN 117 taking care of her; she was in good hands, and after all, SPARTANs never die, they are only missing in action. And here she was thinking she was going to have a pleasant day today.

And just how many are missing in action? No, here's a better question, how many aren't? How many children were taken by force from their homes in the middle of the night, and told that they're not allowed to be human anymore? How many of those kids were forced into physically extreme, rigorous, even life threatening train, and their only reward was to be pumped full of chemicals that tore them apart from the inside out? How many died during augmentation? Every single one, for those things that came out of those pods, they weren't them anymore. No, she was wrong, not a single child was killed during augmentation; she killed them all the day she brought them in. She closed her eyes as the memories came back to her, ones of trauma and horror and despair, ones of hatred and outrage and retaliation, but the worst were the silent ones. The silent ones showed no fear, no resistance, no anger, but cold judgement. Their eyes pierced her soul in the crowd of six year old before and below her, they'd stare back up at her with the same cold malcontent she showed when orders were not followed, and when something went wrong, when a SPARTAN was declared "Missing in Action", they would look at her; no anger, no pain, just a look, it didn't have to be any more than that, because they knew that she knew, knew that this was her fault, and that she

would take it with her to her grave.

"Doctor? Doctor Halsey? Doctor!"

She opened her eyes again, noticing the AI had been trying to gain her attention. Her room had grown colder and the music had long since played out, an eerie silence filled the lab. "Yes, what is it Cortana?"

"Your heart rate had increased rapidly; I am programed to notify you of this occurrence and to contact emergency personnel if you do not respond in the appropriate manner in the allocated time frame."

Halsey smiled to herself, remembering how shrinks and psychiatrists had insisted this be implemented into Cortana's programming. She had been reluctant at first, insisting in response she was perfectly capable of managing her own mental wellbeing, but she found a way to make it hers. "Oly Oly Oxen Free." She replied.

"Password accepted, returning to pervious objective."

"Replay track three" she said, returning to her thoughts.

Those words were the ones she had taught them, long ago. They had taken those words and made it their own, they called them to signify they were SPARTANs and to respond correctly was to be a SPARTAN. That's how she lived with herself, she knew them. Of course she was supposed to remind herself that because of their sacrifice millions of lives were now safe, that the ends justify the means, that she must sacrifice the few to save the many. But the real reason she wasn't a walking mess, the real thing that helped her sleep at night, was that she knew every SPARTAN by name. She made sure to completely understand each and every last one of them, she knew them probably more than their families did, she knew them because no one else would. Through all the hate and rebellious things SPARTANs did during training, the ones who came out had forged a bond with her, they were all her children, and she was their mother. All of them had given a piece of themselves to Halsey, and she gave them each a piece of herself. She wondered how many pieces she had left to herself now.

Because in truth, her mind wasn't full of important research data, stats and figures, theories and concepts, thoughts that a top ONI scientist, Project Leader, and visionary should think about. No, her mind was full of all the names and faces of her children, and each and every one of them she would never see again. Because they weren't out there somewhere, they weren't lost.

SPARTANs never die, if only that were true.

End
file.